

The Munsey Building
1327-1329 E Street NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-358

HABS,
DC,
WASH,
237-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

HABS No. DC-358

THE MUNSEY BUILDING

Location: 1327-1329 E Street, N.W., Lot 805, north side of E Street between 13th and 14th Streets, N.W., Washington, District of Columbia.

Present Owner: The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, (PADC)
425 13th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Occupant and Use: Vacant

Significance: The Munsey Building is the work of one of the country's most prominent architectural firms, McKim, Mead and White. The original structure, designed in 1905, was typical of the firm's application of the principles of the Italian Renaissance palazzo, a vertical tripartite composition of classical elements, to the tall buildings of the twentieth century. These principles are evident, although simplified and reduced in scale, in the 1915 addition which altered the facade and added a large wing on the west and a twelfth story. The facade is less monumental than other buildings designed by McKim, Mead and White in the Washington area, such as the Army War College and the Washington Club. This is not true of the interior of the building, which, with its high quality materials and classical details, established the Munsey as one of the more elegant private office spaces in the city. As an urban design element, the Munsey Building's facade helps to define the open square at the western end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The original Munsey Building was built in 1905. The addition was built in 1915.
2. Architects: For both the original building and the addition, McKim, Mead and White of New York City.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Munsey Building was originally built for, and owned by, Frank A. Munsey of New York City. There is no record of ownership between 1904 and 1910. The deed was transferred from 1913 as follows (reference is to the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.):

- 1913 Deed, May 17, 1913, recorded in Liber 11333, Folio 110.
Frank A. Munsey to Munsey Trust Company.
- 1959 Deed, December 14, 1959, recorded in Liber 11333, Folio 520.
Munsey Realty Company to Beatrice Kisseleff.
- 1959 Deed, December 14, 1959, recorded in Liber 11353, Folio 512.
Beatrice Kisseleff to Arnold Gottlieb.
- 1963 Deed, May 24, 1963, recorded in Liber 12002, Folio 512.
Arnold Gottlieb to E Street Corporation.
- 1973 Deed, March 8, 1973, recorded in Liber 13458, Folio 512.
Jerry Wolman to Edward Dreyfuss.

In 1979, ownership was transferred to the National Press Club from E. Dreyfuss. The PADC subsequently purchased the Munsey Building in the spring of 1979.

4. Builder, contractor: The 1905 Munsey Building and the 1915 additions were built by the George Fuller Construction Company (Permits #2128, \$300,000, and 3287, \$290,000, respectively).
5. Original plans and construction: The original plans for the 1905 Munsey Building and the 1915 additions are on file at the New York Historical Society. Photocopies of some of the 1905 drawing are included in the HABS documentation. A photograph in Washington Today, published in 1910, reveals that the building was constructed according to the original plans.
6. Alteration & Additions: Two photographs reveal that the south elevation was altered between 1910 and 1915. The facade was simplified between the fourth floor and the tenth floor. The large Tuscan columns that divided the lower three floors into three major bays, each further subdivided by rectangular windows, were retained in this alteration. (See supplemental information, rental brochure)

In 1915, McKim Mead and White designed the west addition to the Munsey Building. It consisted of three east-west wings that extend laterally from the original volume forming an E-shaped plan. Circulation through these new wings originated from the central abutment which is solely a circulation core. Six elevators were installed in 1915 (Permit #20, cost \$55,000) as well as another stairway to the west of the elevators. The 1915 addition also added a full floor to the original eleven story building. The new facade was made continuous over both the original and new addition of Munsey Building. The colossal Tuscan columns at the first four floors and a heavy polychrome glazed terra cotta cornice at the tenth floor were eliminated, except along the east elevation and eastern section of the north elevation.

The interior upper floors were only slightly altered in 1915. The first floor was altered extensively to accommodate the Munsey Trust Company, initially formed in 1913. Walls of marble, glass and brass grillwork were removed and replaced with marble paneling. North of the lobby, the ceiling was lowered to accommodate a mezzanine above, and a new vault was installed with offices flanking and directly behind it. New restrooms were added, and access to the remaining freight elevator was blocked. On the upper floors, access was transferred to the new vertical circulation core. The removal of the three elevators allowed for the addition of more office space. Restrooms behind the elevators were removed and placed in former office spaces near the freight elevators.

B. Historical Events and Person Connected with the Structure:

The Munsey Building was constructed to house the Washington Times, owned since 1891 by Frank Andrew Munsey. From the plans for the 1905 building, it is evident that initial and subsequent uses of the Munsey Building's upper stories have not changed. Through sources in the Washingtoniana Room at the Martin Luther King Library, and conversations with Thomas R. Imlay of Shannon and Luchs Realtors who managed the Munsey for many years, it is possible to determine building use since its construction, and its tenants since 1914 (prior to this date, information is not available).

The basement of the 1905 Munsey Building held the mechanical equipment for the Washington Times (from original drawings). Their offices were located on the first and second floors. Copy and engraving departments were on the third floor, and the advertising department was on the fourth floor. The first floor Washington Times offices were shared by the Munsey Trust Company after 1913. The Munsey Trust Company's realty office was on the eighth floor. The United Press Association occupied part of the second floor.

The remainder of the Munsey Building (from the third floor) was rental space with offices that could be rented out singly or en suite and arranged in any combination desired. Tenants ranged from the Girl Scouts (fifth floor) to the Elm City Lumber Company (eleventh floor); there also appeared many lawyers, brokers and corporations.

The 1917 District of Columbia directory shows that the first tenant in the commercial lobby of the 1915-1916 addition was the Benjamin I. Jaffe cigar store. The first floor maintained the Washington Times Company and the Munsey Trust Company in the existing lobby. (From hand sketches of 1915 lobby, NY Historical Society; permit #3287, 2/25/15). After the sale of the Washington Times editorial offices remained in the Munsey Building until 1923. In 1920, fourth floor offices in the Munsey appear for the New York Herald, the New York Sun, the New York Evening Telegram, and the Baltimore News; all owned by Frank Munsey at the time. The New York Globe, also owned by Munsey, had an office on the eighth floor in 1922. From 1925, except for the first floor, still occupied by the Munsey Trust Company, the office space in the Munsey Building was rented to various small tenants. On January 28, 1959, the banking interest of the Munsey Trust Company was sold to the Union Trust Company by the F. Luchs syndicate. They later changed their name to the Union First Bank, and remained in the Munsey until its closing in 1979.

~~At the time of initial construction of the Munsey Building, Frank Munsey was at the peak of his publishing career, purchasing and selling newspapers one after another in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. Although Munsey strove to publish a superior daily newspaper, the continuous merging and closing of his journals caused the publishing world to coin the phrase "let Munsey kill it". The Washington Times, and his other publications, "reflect the viewpoint of the average prosperous American concerned with his own success". (Dictionary of American Biography, p. 336)~~

With tremendous earnings from his endeavors, Munsey formed the Munsey Trust Company of Washington, D.C., in 1913, with offices in the original Munsey Building. When World War I began, Munsey was in Carlsbad. He immediately took measures for the relief of traveling Americans stranded by war conditions. Entering into all of the civilian activities engendered by the war, he contributed over a quarter of a million dollars to funding them. When Munsey called for expansion of his building, his earning power was based on the combination of profits from the Munsey Trust Company, his chain of Mohican grocery stores (The Mohican), and the various newspapers and magazines he was constantly merging or destroying.

B. Sources of Information

1. Original architectural drawings: The drawings for the original 1905 Munsey Building and the 1915 addition are available for viewing at the New York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York New York. The collection includes site plan, sections, elevations, basement plan, and corridor elevations, basement plan, and corridor elevations for the 1905 building, and exterior detailing, steel framing and

plans and elevations for the 1915 addition. There are no floor plans from either 1905 or 1915.

2. Old views: From the collection of the Martin Luther King Library, negative #6856, a view of E Street between 13th and 14th Streets facing east, the Munsey Building is visible just prior to construction of the addition. Another photo published by the Washington Post in their Bicentennial pamphlet "Remember Joys" shows a portion of the lower floors of the Munsey Building. In Charles Ewing's book, Yesterday's Washington, there is a view of the new building after its completion.

Washington Today, 1910 (Martin Luther King Library, 685.9 W. W277 Vol. #2) contains the only known picture of the Munsey Building as originally constructed.

3. Bibliography

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Washington D.C. Office of the Recorder of Deeds, 1913-1979.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

American Architecture and Building News, Volume 89, May 12, 1906.

Barnhart, Clarence (ed.) New Century Cyclopedia of Names, New York: Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1954.

National Cyclopedia of American Biography, New York: James White and Co. 1898.

Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C. Volumes 37-38, 46-47, 48-49.

Roth, Leland M., The Architecture of McKim, Mead and White, 1870-1920, A Building List, New York; Garland, 1978.

Shannon, John Henry, "The Rambler", selections from column in The Evening Star, Washington, D.C., 1912-1927.

Washington Today, 1910, publisher unknown.

Prepared by Wendy Hunter
Pennsylvania Avenue
Development Corporation
October 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Munsey Building is a twelve-story, Italian Renaissance Revival building, built in two stages over a ten year period. The original 1905 rectangular structure was enlarged in 1915 by three east-west wings that laterally abut the original structure forming an E-shaped plan. A full story was also added to the original eleven-story building in 1915. At the time of its construction, the Munsey Building was a tall structure for Washington. Although the 1915 alterations simplified the facade, the building maintains its vertical tripartite arrangement of classical architectural elements, and presents a formal and imposing mass. The facade (south elevation) features its three lower levels clad in marble, while the side and rear elevations are all clad in beige brick with stone or glazed terra cotta elements.
2. Condition of the fabric: The Munsey Building has been well maintained and all elements are in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: The Munsey Building is located on two rectangular lots which are centered on E Street. The combined dimensions are 130' X 159'. The lot is serviced from the rear by a 30' wide public alley.

The main (E Street) facade is divided into east and west sections and has eleven bays: Six to the east (3 structural bays) and five to the west (3 structural bays). After final additions and alterations, the Munsey Building is twelve stories high with a basement (approximately 160'). The central east-west wing is one story taller, allowing for the mechanical equipment of the elevators.

2. Wall construction, finish and color:
 - a. South elevation: Each structural bay of the south facade is two windows wide, except for the half-width central bay of the west section, which contains a single window. At the first and second stories, each structural bay is defined by large Tuscan pilasters. Above, this elevation is simply fenestrated and is articulated by limited ornamentation and cornices at the second, third, ninth and tenth floors. The second and ninth floors act as the horizontal bands that create a tripartite facade. The second floor's interfenestrations are ornamented with haut-relief plaques. The two top floors (eleventh and twelfth) are treated as an arcade that runs the full length of the facade and is crowned by a large Corinthian cornice.

- b. West elevation: The west elevation is now exposed, although the former Washington Post Building originally abutted the Munsey Building on this side. The ghost of the roof ridge of the Post Building is still quite evident. On the south wing, the three bays of the upper floors and the south bay of the eighth floor are clad in stone. Except for the two ninth floor fasciae, the cornices and entablatures of the main facade are returned on the west elevation of the south wing. There is a three bay arcade spanning the eleventh and twelfth floors: the central bay is blind. The central vertical circulation wing is constructed of beige brick; it is both one story higher and narrower than the north and south wings. It has an entirely blind west facade with belt courses at the ninth, tenth and twelfth floors. There is a single two-story ornamental arch springing from the tenth floor cornice. Finally, the north wing is constructed of beige brick. It is three bays wide and is articulated by stone courses at the ninth, tenth and twelfth floors with a central blind arch.
 - c. North elevation: The north (alley) elevation has been divided into east and west sections by different ornamental programs reflecting the original construction and the 1915 addition. Despite this, the entire elevation is one continuous flush surface. As in the main facade, there are eleven window bays, six on the east and five on the west. The wall is faced in beige brick. On the western half, the area between the fifth and sixth floor is differentiated by distinctive white glazed brick. Above the tenth floor, white glazed brick is used on the east, or original building portion, and the 1905 detailing appears to remain. There is a massive oversailing cornice of polychrome terra-cotta at the tenth floor which exemplifies the original cornice treatment. Two more levels of windows occur above this cornice and the building terminates in a glazed white terra cotta cornice.
 - d. East elevation: The east elevation is visible above the National Theatre and is divided into three sections. The central eight-bay portion is recessed from the two end pavilions. This middle section and the north pavilion are treated in a fashion similar to the 1905 alley (north) elevation, including the dominant polychromed cornice at the floor. In contrast the south pavilion is treated in the same manner as the main 1915 facade (south). At the transition point between the two treatments of the east facade there is an awkward shift in emphasis from the building's attic arcade, with its great top cornice, to to the opulent tenth floor polychrome cornice line.
3. Foundations: Reinforced concrete footings support the steel structure.
 4. Structural system, framing: Both portions have steel frames.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: A one-story prostyle Roman Dproc entrance porch is centered on both the east (original) and west (addition) wings of the structure. Both contain turn style glass and bronze doors. In the west addition, section storefronts flank the central entrance with individual doors of glass and steel.
- b. Windows: Windows are original to the 1915 reconstruction, some perhaps to the original 1905 building. Two types are prevalent: double hung wood sash windows and metal framed folding casements on the 1915 wing.

6. Roof:

An elaborate cut stone Corinthian cornice is visible on the entire south elevation, the west, and eastern half of the north elevation. The remaining east and eastern half of the north elevation retain the original heavy polychrome glazed terra cotta cornice at the tenth floor level.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. 1st floor: The public banking room at the front of the original portion of the building is five bays deep by three bays wide. It is an open space supported by parallel rows of three fluted Greek Doric columns. The sixth (rear) bay contains a new vault. Behind it are service areas and a secondary vault. The west (addition) portion's layout is carefully integrated with the structural grid. A central corridor, the width of the narrower central bay, runs back four structural bays into the building to meet the vertical circulation core. This core contains a bank of six elevators and a stairway at the northwest corner. There are commercially leased areas which flank the central corridor, each with direct access from the corridor and the sidewalk. The entire area is characterized by luxurious detailing in marble, wood and brass.
- b. Typical plan above: The typical floor plan provides for an E-shaped corridor leading from the vertical circulation core at the transverse central wing. Corridors are double loaded with office space on both sides.

2. Stairways: The open stairwell, once part of the elevator lobby in the central circulation core, houses a half-turn steel staircase with landings; the stringers, risers and newels contain decorative recessed panels. The stair treads are a cream-colored marble; the handrail, wood; and the balusters, turned metal.

3. Flooring: Lobbies and corridors have 1'x 1' white marble perimeters. Each office entrance is marked by transverse black and red marble bands on the paving. Original flooring in individual offices have been covered by respective tenants with carpets, tiles, etc. There is a tongue-and-groove wood finish beneath.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: The Munsey Building interior is characterized throughout by meticulous classical details. Most of the original finishes are in excellent condition. The bank has marble paneled walls punctuated by marble Roman Doric pilasters. Greek Doric columns, composed of four drums (the bottom drum is not fluted) provide freestanding support and express the structural grid in the bank's open space. Transverse beams are dropped, decorated with entablatures and paneled soffits. Light fixtures, originally hanging, are now replaced by modern fluorescent fixtures. They hang from rectangular panels and are surrounded by decorative fretwork. Diaper-motif panels cover the remaining ceiling area. The bank's rear service area to the north has plastered walls and acoustical tile ceilings. The restrooms have marble wainscots. The vestibule of the 1915 west wing has marble floors and rusticated marble clad walls. The ceiling is paneled. The first floor corridor, leading to the vertical circulation core, has 6 foot high marble-paneled partitions modulated by marble clad pilasters. The open area above the partition is subdivided into an "a-b-a" rhythm by two pillars rising from the partition to intersect the beam soffit. The resulting open areas are glazed and framed in bronze.

On typical upper floors, the elevator lobby walls are finished with marble wainscoting, plaster walls and coved ceilings. Corridors have 5 foot high marble-clad partitions with glass lights set in varnished wood frames.

5. Doorways and doors: On each floor, doorways and doors are of varnished wood with glass lights above marble partitions set in varnished wood frames. The original second floor rest room has a louvered wood door.
6. Hardware:
 - a. Elevators: The six manually operated elevators are wood paneled and have brass handrails and trim. Original doors have been covered with an aluminum coat bearing a black motif of the Art Nouveau Style.

- b. Knobs, locks and mail slots: All are original to the 1905 and 1915 building and are of brass. There is a large brass mailbox in the first floor of the 1915 addition.

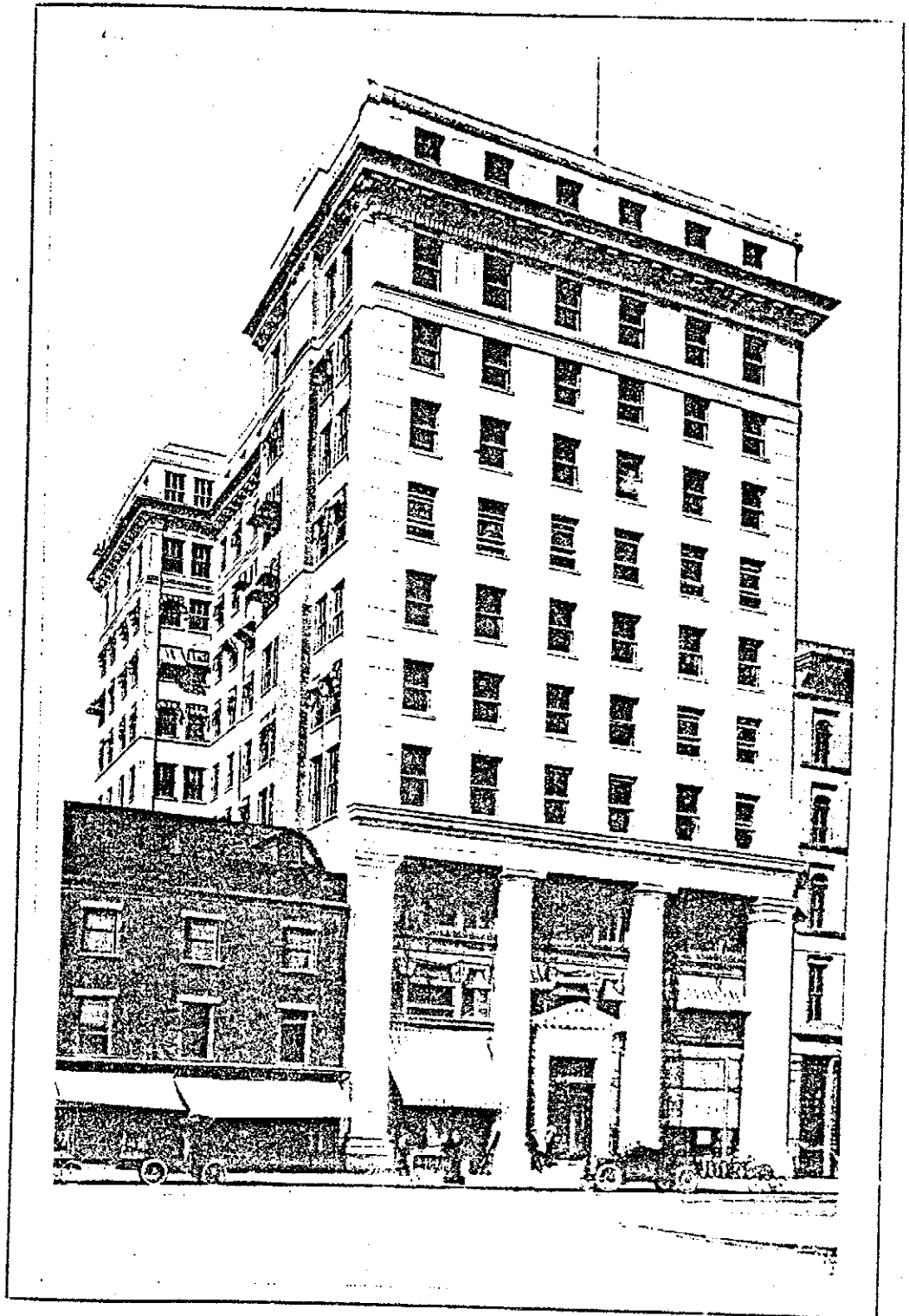
D. Site:

When the Munsey Building was built in 1905, E Street was lined with mid-sized commercial buildings. This scale was altered tremendously when Frank Munsey built his structure of eleven stories. The Munsey Building replaced the Lawrence Hotel, a five-story building where one could get a room for 50¢ a night. Adjacent to the Munsey on the east was the old National Theater, one of five entertainment establishments built in the 1300 block of E Street. Staley's Dining Room (later the Ceres Restaurant) was directly east of the old National Theater. West of the Munsey was the Engle Building, a bowling alley, which was demolished in 1915 for the Munsey addition. The new Munsey Building and the Old Washington Post Building shared firewalls until 1955, when the Post was demolished for a parking garage. The Stone Building and the Loughran Building, each housing evening entertainment, were west of the Washington Post Building.

Currently, only four buildings are original to the block, and only one (the Loughran Building; see HABS data) retains its original facade. The south facade of the Munsey Building, together with the National Theater, define the northern boundary of the Western Plaza. West of the Munsey Building is a parking garage. These structures will be demolished as part of the PADC plan. Important structures surrounding the Western Plaza are the District Building on the south, the Willard Hotel on the northwest corner, the Warner Building on the northeast and the Pennsylvania Building directly east.

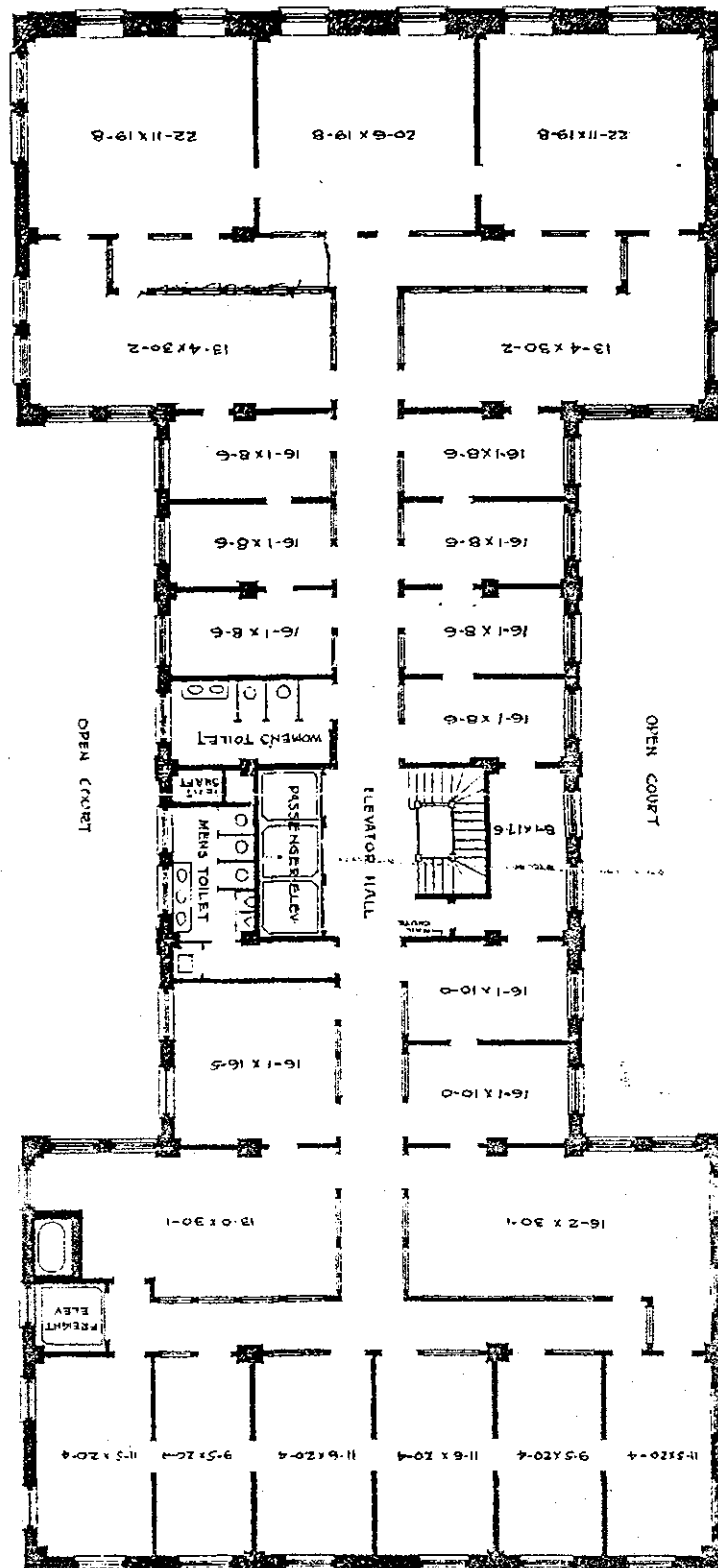
Prepared by Wendy Hunter
Pennsylvania Avenue Development
Corporation
8 October 1979

PART III. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION
A. Rental Brochure: ca. 1912



THE MUNSEY BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN



(Rental Brochure, cont'd)

THE MUNSEY BUILDING

THIS magnificent, marble front, fire-proof building is one of the classiest and most up-to-date office buildings in Washington.

It faces Pennsylvania Avenue between 13th and 14th Streets and is surrounded by the principal hotels, theaters and newspaper offices. The new Municipal Building is directly opposite and the surface lines running to the Union Station, the White House, the Capitol Building and most of the Government Buildings, pass the door.

The Post-Office and U. S. Treasury Building are but two squares distant, and the main offices of the Western Union and Postal Telegraph Companies are within a few hundred feet of the building.

The character of the building and its location appeals particularly to Lawyers, Brokers, Newspapermen, Corporations, and all who desire refined up-to-date offices in close touch with the business and political life of Washington.

A spacious marble entrance leads to the elevator rotunda and stairway. The corridors and halls are lined with marble, with mosaic floors. The interior trim is of oak, with selected maple floors.

The toilet rooms on each floor are light and well ventilated, with white tile floors and wainscoting, and marble partitions, making them at all times light and sanitary.

Its elevator equipment is unsurpassed, as it has four Otis elevators with a speed of 400 feet per minute, which are at the service of the tenants day and night, including Sundays. Its heating plant is of the best. Telephone and ticker wires run to each room, thus avoiding delays and annoyance in procuring these connections. Its electrical equipment is most complete, tungsten lights being used throughout the building.

The Munsey Building has a frontage of 70 feet and extends back 159 feet to a 20-foot alley. It is eleven stories in height, exclusive of basement, with two courts 14 feet by 52 feet, so that every office in the building has ample direct natural light and perfect ventilation, there being no inside or dark offices.

The upper floors, towering above the adjacent buildings, afford a magnificent view of Washington and the surrounding country.

Its offices are so planned that they can be rented singly or *en suite* and arranged in any combination desired, special care having been given to their size and division, based on the experience of the latest and best examples of office buildings.

Its management is such that tenants may always be assured of the utmost in service, accommodations, and courteous treatment.

If you are contemplating a change in location, do not fail to inspect the Munsey Building, as its superior advantages, central location, and reasonable rents will appeal to you.

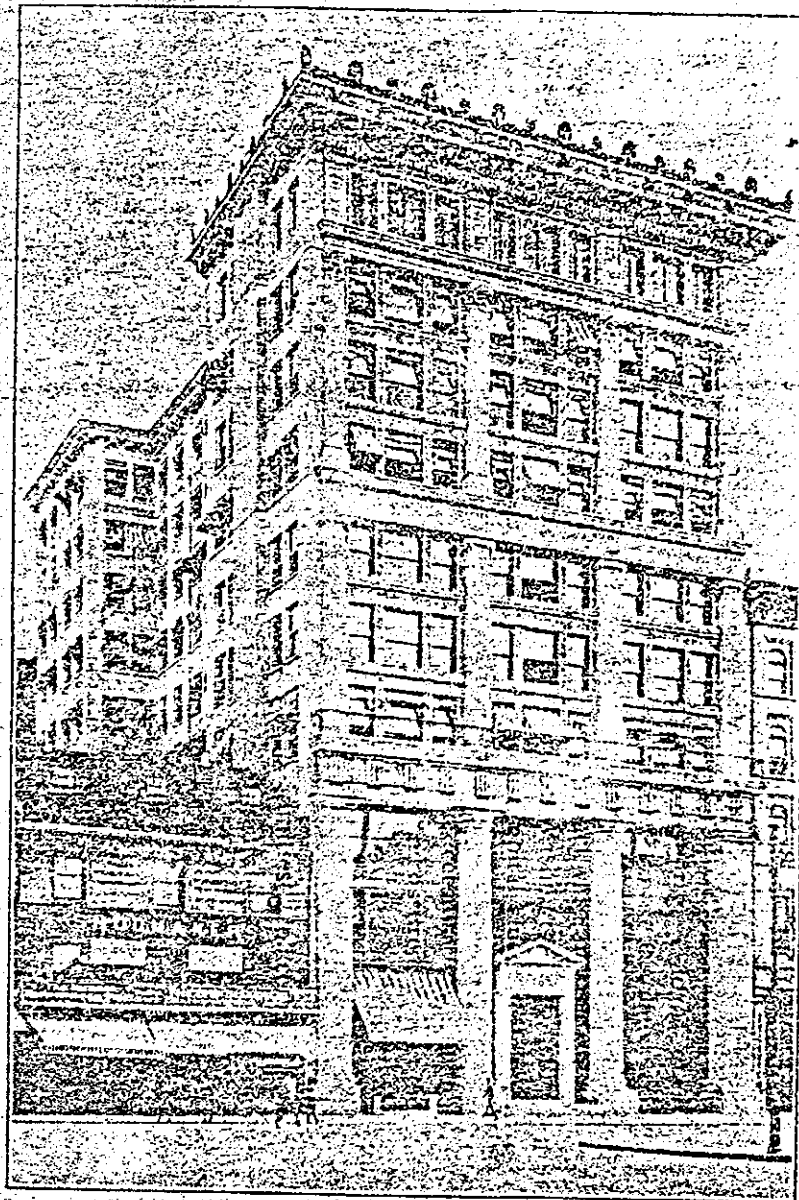
For further particulars, plans, and rates, apply to

RENTING AGENT,

(On premises.)

Tel. Main 5200

B. Photograph from Washington Today, 1910 (print not available)



THE MUNSEY BUILDING
Home of the Washington Times

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the completion of the Pennsylvania Avenue development plan. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS project coordinator. The records were prepared under the general supervision of Jeffrey S. Wolf, Architect with PADC. Historic data was compiled by PADC consultants in historic preservation, Anderson Notter/Mariani, and expanded by Wendy Hunter, Architect with PADC. Architectural measured drawings were prepared by Jeffrey S. Wolf, Bethanie C. Grashof, Carlos D. Davis, Joan B. Duncan, Wendy F. Hunter and Michael J. Kopchik for PADC and Anderson Notter/Mariani. Photographs were taken by Jeffrey S. Wolf and Robert Hood in October 1979. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Emily J. Harris, architectural historian in the HABS office, in April 1980.
